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DEPARTMENT FOR DS/IP/RD/SCA, DS/DSS/ITA, CA AND SA/INS  
NEW DELHI FOR LEGAL ATTACH

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ASEC CASC PTER

SUBJECT: EMBASSY COLOMBO EAC MEETING 02/05/2008

¶11. (SBU) Summary: AmEmbassy Colombo convened an Emergency Action Committee (EAC) meeting on February 5, 2008. The EAC discussed Post's security posture in light of terrorist attacks on February 2, 3 and 4 (the weekend prior to, and the day of, Sri Lankan Independence Day). The EAC recommended, and the Ambassador concurred, to prohibit use of some modes of public transportation, to strengthen Post's travel notification system and to revise the Travel Warning and Consular Information Sheet. End summary.

¶12. (SBU) On February 5, 2008, AmEmbassy Colombo convened an EAC meeting. Present for the meeting were the Ambassador, DCM, RSO, CONS, RAO, MGT, CLO, DHS, USAID, DAO, ECON, POL, PAO and MSG DetCmdr. The EAC discussed Post's security posture and safety for U.S. citizens in Sri Lanka, in light of the following incidents (all times local):

--February 2

0700 hours (7:00 AM): A bomb exploded aboard a bus that was stopped in Dambulla (Matale Province), on the route from Kandy to Anuradhapura. The explosion of the device, believed to have been a parcel bomb planted on the bus, killed 20 civilians and wounded another 50-plus. Dambulla is approximately 90 miles northeast of Colombo, in the Cultural Triangle (a well known tourist destination).

--February 3

1000 hours (10:00 AM): A hand grenade, set on a timing device, exploded in the Dehiwala Zoo, injuring seven people and causing the temporary closure of the zoo. Dehiwala is a Colombo suburb, and the zoo attracts American citizens as well as Sri Lankans.

1400 hours (2:00 PM): A female suicide bomber detonated a device in the Colombo railway station, located in the area known as Fort. The explosion, which occurred on Platform Three during a busy travel time, killed 14 and injured over 100 persons. Police conjecture that the bomber may have detonated her device to avoid detection and capture by security forces in the station.

--February 4

0605 hours (6:05 AM): An explosion of an improvised device in Mount Lavinia (Colombo area) destroyed an electrical transformer and damaged several residences in the area of the explosion.

1410 hours (2:10 PM): A claymore mine attack targeting a Sri Lanka Army tractor at kilometer 45 on the Buttala to Kataragama road (Uva Province) killed one soldier and injured

three others.

1430 hours (2:30 PM): A minor explosion in an abandoned field in Moratuwa (south of Colombo) caused no injuries or damage. Police sources informed the RSO that the device was a hand grenade triggered by a timer, similar to the device used in the Dehiwala Zoo. Sources speculated that someone abandoned the device when security measures prevented him/her from reaching the intended target.

1600 hours (4:00 PM): A roadside bomb attack on a civilian bus killed 15 people in Ethawatunuweva, Welioya (North Central Province).

¶13. (SBU) The RSO advised the EAC that in addition to the incidents noted above, the Sri Lanka Police Service (SLPS) claimed to have diverted another explosion when SLPS discovered and defused a parcel bomb containing one kilogram of C-4 explosive in the Nugegoda/Kohuwala area (Colombo suburbs). The police said they discovered the parcel, which had been planted in a telephone booth, on February 4. The SLPS also reported the recovery on February 2 of two suicide jackets and bomb-making components, including nine kilograms of explosives, in Mabole, Wattala (Colombo area).

¶14. (SBU) The Ambassador commented that this spike in activity indicated that the security situation was clearly deteriorating. He noted that while the incidents had not targeted or injured American citizens or interests, they revealed a heightened risk to tourists and other travelers in Sri Lanka (RSO note - American citizens are known to use the railway, visit the Dehiwala Zoo, and travel to the Cultural Triangle). The EAC recommended prohibiting official Americans (those under Chief of Mission authority) from using public modes of transportation such as trains and buses. The Ambassador concurred that such a ban was prudent, given the increase in attacks on buses and the main Colombo Railway station.

¶15. (SBU) The EAC also agreed on the following measures:

--Prohibit official American citizens and their eligible family members from traveling on trains and buses. Other forms of public transportation (air travel and taxis) are not included in the ban.

--Issue a warden message reiterating that American citizens are strongly advised to not use buses and trains. The warden message noted (in accordance with the No Double Standard policy) that official Americans' travel by bus and train is prohibited until further notice.

--Strengthen Post's Travel Warning and Consular Information Sheet to reflect the heightened risk of in-country travel.

--Revise Post's in-country travel notification requirements for official Americans. Currently, employees notify RSO when traveling within Sri Lanka for personal travel. New procedures will require that employees notify RSO and their Section/Agency heads. Section/Agency heads will be accountable for tracking and locating employees in case of emergencies.

--RSO, MGT and CLO will meet with parents to review school transportation and security issues. (Note: Government and government-supported schools in Colombo are closed, as a security precaution, for the rest of this week. The Overseas School of Colombo, which most Embassy children attend, and other international schools remain open.)

¶16. (U) Post will continue to monitor the security environment, and will report further developments, if any, septel. POC for this message is RSO Michael V. Perkins, who may be contacted at 94.11.249.8885, 94.11.249.8888 (MSG Post 1 after regular business hours), or via the classified and unclassified email systems.

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